

Narrator: Schoolteacher of Beypazarı
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How Can I Forget My Father?

[dialect story imitative of Kurdish speech. Ethnologically important for view of Kurdish way of life and reaction of other Turks to it.]

How can I ever forget my father? He was such a man of wealth that even though the immense Euphrates River used to run past his house, he wouldn't give even a drop of water to anyone who asked for it. He stole nine donkeys, took them to nine different mills and across nine different bridges, and then he brought them home saying that they were his legitimate property.

One day my father became ill. He said to us, "Oh, my children, I am dying. Go and ask the neighbors to come." We went and called Fato, Haso, Mehmo, and Keco.¹

When the neighbors came, my father said to them, "Oh, my neighbors, I am dying. I once stole nine donkeys, took them to nine different mills and across nine different bridges, and then I brought them back home and now they are my property. When I die, sell two of these donkeys and give the money to my children; kill two of them and have the meat distributed among the neighbors so that they may eat in my memory;² give two of them to the men who dig my grave and ask them to absolve me of any obligation to them; and give the hoca effendi three and tell him to absolve me of any obligation in the next world."

How can I ever forget him? After he said this, he became roasted coffee [dark in the face], coiled up like a snake, barked three times

¹ These are Kurdish pronunciations of Turkish names, Fatma, Hasan, Mehmet, and some other name, probably Kazim.

² Horses and donkeys are not eaten by Turks, and so distributing as supposed largesse donkey meat strikes Turkish audiences as hilariously funny.

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a dog, mewed three times like a cat, and gave up the ghost. The hoca effendi ordered three cakes of soap, three cauldrons of water, and three brooms. My father was stretched on a table in front of the door, and the hoca effendi washed him thoroughly with the brooms. How can I explain it to you clearly? When washing my father, the hoca brushed off chunks of dirt so large that one hit a small dog and killed it; they buried that dog with my father.³

By the time my father was completely washed, the floods of water had made a deep ditch behind the house. We placed him in that ditch and put a slab of stone over the ditch to cover him. How can I ever forget him?

³ Kurds are nomadic people living in tents. Whether or not they ever wash is a moot question; many Turks insist that Kurds never wash. Dogs are considered unclean animals and would not be buried with a human being by orthodox Moslems.